

**REMARKS OF SENATOR LISA MURKOWSKI
VETERANS AND REMEMBRANCE DAY
NOVEMBER 11, 2007
ANCHORAGE ARMORY
FORT RICHARDSON, ALASKA**

It is an honor to join with you today at what is one of the truly unique ceremonies among all in America this Veterans Day weekend.

Communities across America are pausing to remember those who have defended our Nation's freedom over these past 231 years. On the 11th hour, on the eleventh day of the eleventh month, we join them. But we here in the north do things a bit differently.

Like other communities across America we gather today to express our appreciation to the men and women who have served in the Armed Forces of the United States. Here in Alaska, we also share this special day with our friends and allies from Canada who are observing Remembrance Day.

Remembrance Day, first observed in 1919, commemorates Canadians who have died in the First and Second World Wars, the Korean War, subsequent peacekeeping missions and the Global War on Terror.

In Alaska this day is Veterans and Remembrance Day. We observe both in recognition of the two great Nations that share responsibility for the mutual defense of our northern frontier. The bonds between these two Nations run deep and they are not limited to the Northern reaches of the North American continent.

Today, more than 3,100 Canadian Forces are deployed away from home on missions in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. More than 2,500 Canadian Forces are serving alongside American troops in a common mission to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan. We pray for the safety of our Canadian brothers and sisters as we pray for the safety of our own troops.

As Alaskans we have much to be thankful for this Veterans Day. In early October some 600 members of the Third Battalion, 207th Infantry Brigade of the Alaska National Guard returned home after a year's service in Kuwait and Southern Iraq. The soldiers of the 3/207 came from 81 different communities around Alaska. The battalion includes substantial numbers of Alaska's first peoples – Eskimos, Indians and Aleuts. They served with distinction in climates that were quite different from those in which they have lived and trained.

We are beginning to welcome home the members of the 4th Brigade Combat Team from Fort Richardson who have served a very difficult fifteen months in Iraq. This Veterans Day our hearts are with the families who lost a loved to the war. Our Alaska communities pledge our continued support to you as you rebuild your lives. And our support for these returning paratroopers is as strong as ever.

On Veterans Day 2006, the members of the 172nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team from Fort Wainwright were wrapping up their extended service in Iraq. Today, they are home preparing for their next mission as the 1/25 Stryker Brigade Combat Team.

Other Alaska units are deployed or deploying. On Tuesday, a task force of 130 soldiers from Fort Wainwright will deploy to Iraq. In late October, 180 National Guard soldiers from the Bravo Company, 297th Support Battalion deployed to Iraq. Other Alaskans are serving abroad in various roles this weekend in all branches of our Armed Forces. When these brave men and women complete their service they will join the ranks of our veterans.

We used to think that Veterans Day was mostly about remembering the greatest generation – those that fought in conflicts past. With large numbers of service members returning from deployment abroad, we need to think about Veterans Day in the present tense and in the future tense.

Yes, it remains a day to honor, but it is also a day to reflect. A day to reflect on whether we are doing all that we should to help our veterans overcome the burdens of war. And when I say “we” I’m not just referring to Jerry Beale’s office or the VA. “We” means all of us – our entire Alaska community.

I’ve been thinking a lot about this very issue. Last Spring, I spent a week visiting the military hospitals, the Anchorage VA healthcare system, and the Community Based Outpatient Clinics. I needed to know that the horror stories we were reading about at Walter Reed and other military treatment facilities didn’t exist in Alaska.

I needed to know whether we were ready to treat the PTSD and TBI cases of returning servicemen and women. I conducted a roundtable with mental health professionals on the challenges of helping our returning warriors adapt to life off of the battlefield.

And I spent hours in conversations with veterans at the Vet Centers in Anchorage, Fairbanks and in the Mat-Su Valley to find out what things were really like for them. I visited with veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan and veterans of conflicts past.

I learned from our Vietnam era veterans that this Nation still has a long way to go in helping them overcome the ghosts of a conflict that ended thirty years ago.

As veterans of the Global War on Terror come home in larger numbers, the Vietnam era veteran wonders whether they will have to wait in line behind the present generation to receive services. Services they have been waiting to receive for more than three decades.

They also ask, and rightfully so, whether our Nation should feel confident that today's veterans will receive the care they need when we still haven't fully addressed the needs of our Vietnam era veterans. Very legitimate questions.

Political scientists tell us that our government acts when an issue ranks high in the minds of the American people. The converse is true too. When the American people stop paying attention to the issue it moves to the back burner.

This Veterans Day my message to Alaskans is that if you support the veteran, join with me in demanding that our veterans get the services they need, without unreasonable waiting periods, and in the places that they live. Do that every day not just on Veterans Day.

But don't stop there. Do all that you can in your everyday life to make life easier for the people who have put their lives on the line in defense of our freedom. One simple way – hire a vet.

During my conversations with recently returned veterans I was disappointed to hear that some are having difficulty finding employment here in Alaska. One of the veterans I met with expressed the concern that those returning from Iraq are stigmatized. If this is true, it is wrong. Connecting our veterans to employment opportunities is one way that all Alaskans can help our recent veterans' transition from military to civilian life.

Alaska is home to more veterans as a percentage of our State's total population than any other State in the union. Veterans choose Alaska because we are a state that supports its troops like no other. It stands to reason that a community that supports the military as strong as we do would be viewed as a community that welcomes the veteran. That's a great reputation to have.

Our veterans are growing in number and they need our support now more than ever. I have every confidence that Alaska will stand up for this generation of veterans – as it has for generations of veteran past. I'm proud to join with you in making this happen.

Thank you and God Bless.